

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DCM

DATE: July 19, 1973

FROM : Ray Peppers

SUBJECT: Recollections of the morning of July 17

My wife and I woke about 0230 July 17 to the sound of a single burst of automatic rifle fire coming, we believe, from the grounds of the Royal Palace. Since we have occasionally heard gunfire other nights, we were not immediately alarmed. One or two minutes later, however, we began to hear single shots interspersed with sporadic bursts from both machine pistols and automatic rifles. The sounds seemed to come from various directions. Some, we thought, came from around the airport; others from deep within the Palace grounds; and still others from near the Palace entrance. (I cannot be certain of the directions, since high walls sometime make it difficult to determine a sound's source.)

At perhaps 0240, we heard two cannon blasts, presumably from a tank. We thought those blasts came from the direction of the Palace, but they might have been from WAKM. They are the only cannon blasts I heard throughout the morning, although my wife maintains that she heard others. We went into our garden after we heard the cannon blasts, and spent the rest of the morning, until 0500, walking about, front and back, and occasionally looking out our gate.

Sporadic but frequent firing continued from various directions, lessening somewhat after dawn, about 0425. After dawn and until 0500, most of the firing which I heard was single-shot, much of it definitely from the Palace grounds. The final shot I heard was at 1000. I interpreted these single shots after dawn as a mopping up of people found hiding. (I don't insist on the interpretation.) Throughout the firing, we heard no shouts or screams or commands.

About 0255, we began to hear tanks and armored cars and personnel carriers passing in both directions in front of our house. One stopped in front of ~~Mr.~~ Daud's house and cut its engine, or perhaps idled. That tank, or several, came again and again throughout the early morning to Daud's house. One personnel carrier broke down just at our door, and we heard the soldiers, raucous and obviously excited. At this point, I ~~for~~ erected a makeshift ladder against our compound wall so that if necessary I could get my family into the Afghan compound next door.

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About 0345, I heard a single helicopter, without lights, circling, I thought, over the Palace grounds. At some time between then and 0415, it seemed to land. ~~Again~~ I thought it landed in the Palace grounds, but it could easily have been in Daud's compound. I don't remember hearing it lift off again.

Before first light, I had taken only fleeting and furtive peeks outside my front gate, but beginning at dawn, I began to take longer and more careful looks, but I could see nothing indicative, except the tank at Daud's house.

At 0440 my nearest neighbor and landlord, Mr. Gholam Mohammad Sherzad, one of Daud's ministers, returned from a drive. I asked him what was happening. He replied, "I've seen Abdul Wali's house, and it's destroyed. (Obviously an exaggeration) You know that everybody hates him, even his own men. I think it would be better if he left the country. I also went to the Prime Minister's house, and he said there had been a little trouble, but it seems to be over now." (Sherzad, in our few conversations, has always referred to Daud as "the Prime Minister!") When I queried him, to be sure whom he was referring to, he maintained that he had said he went "to a police officer's house".

I went to the Embassy about 0510 and returned home about 0600, having told the little I knew to Dave Cohn.

I have only one bit of interpretation: I have heard several times that most of the firing was in the air, and that few people were injured or killed. In all of the time covered by these notes, most of which time during the darkness I was looking over my compound wall toward the palace, I saw not a single tracer. I'm sure the firing there, of which there was a great deal, was not in the air.

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